

The Multimedia CD-Rom "Let's Produce School Newspapers" as a Contribution to the Urgent Integration of Media Education

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Abstract: The European Commission has just published a communication, in order to advise the 27 state members to integrate Media Education in the curricula of all schooling levels. The objective of this initiative is to create opportunities so that students and teachers might be specific trained in order to become critical consumers and reflexive producers of media messages. This paper deals with the design, production, validation and use of the CD-Rom "Vamos fazer jornais escolares" and shows the first results of a research conducted during two years where the CD-Rom was used with students, aged 11-16, so that they could produce media messages for the school newspaper either for the printed or on-line editions.

Key-Words: Multimedia CD-Rom, Media Education, Media Literacy, Citizenship Education, Educational Technology, Critical Readers.

1 Media Literacy' urgency

The European Commission has just published a document which advises all member-states to insert Media Education in the curricula at all levels. This decision aims to start a process in order to approach Europe to countries like Australia, New Zealand or Canada, in which the inclusion of Media Literacy in the curriculum is recognized [1].

Before putting the document forward the European Union organized a public pole on-line between October and December 2006 with the objective of identifying good practices on Media Education. One hundred and three organizations took part in it [2].

In May 2006, eight institutions from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom went ahead with the production of the European Charter for Media Literacy. The main aim of this document, signed, thereafter, by dozens of people and institutions, is "to support the establishment of media literacy across Europe" [3]

The charter refers to the need to alert the media, policy-makers and citizens of the importance of media literacy which will allow the citizen to i) become better acquainted with media technologies and different types of contents; ii) make better informed choices since it stimulates a critical approach to the analysis and appreciation of the media; iii) to develop creativity and use the media as a form of expression and participation in public debates [4].

And what, exactly, is media literacy? For Media-educ this type of education takes on a critical and practical nature, giving main priority to cognitive development and understanding. Its aim, therefore, is to "develop knowledge and understanding of one or more media forms, and it is likely to include both critical and practical activity" [5]. This is something justifiable when the objective is to keep citizens informed and capable of reflecting on media messages instead of accepting them without a second thought. Indeed, as Buckingham mentions "the media do not offer a transparent window of the world". What they do offer are selective versions and representations of that same world [6]. Nowadays literacy is understood as a plural concept. It is something that develops in environments that allow people to: i) express their ideas; ii) learn effectively; iii) participate in written form, characteristics of democratic societies; iv) share knowledge.

Within this broader vision of literacy we consider two aspects: a) the broadening of the concept implies that literate people acquire more and more training and information to keep pace with literacy; b) traditional media and electronic or new media are a constant presence in these rich environments where literacy develops. It is common sense to say that information is delivered through media. So, it is important to develop the skill to analyse critically the media messages. Each citizen should be able to produce messages expressing his/her points of view, using media. Ferry and De Proost support this idea saying

that the citizen should be able to criticize through media [7]. It is important to support what Gonnet calls “éducation aux médias” [8], so that all citizens should use what authors, like Buckingham, call “media literacy”. “Media education is the process of learning and teaching about media; media literacy is the outcome – the knowledge and skills learner acquire” [6].

The need for media literacy is consensual. Gonnet defends that training should begin at the age of five [9]. Clemi (Centre de Liaison de l’Enseignement et des Moyens d’Information) and the French Ministry of Education consider it is possible to initiate literacy at nursery school. Nevertheless, they conclude that more research and ways of making media literacy effective are necessary. “Les activités liées à l’éducation aux médias restent encore largement innovantes” [10].

Nowadays, the media are used in schools but there continues to be confusion between using the media and educating for the media. Remy points out the cases in which there is no media education, but rather “l’instrumentalisation des médias” [11] and goes on to criticize the fact that the school combines the media with its traditional lesson solely to make it more motivating. In the same way, Hobbs also alerts: “Educators often mistakenly believe that they are engaged in expanding the concept of literacy when they use television to teach with and few understand that media literacy consists of teaching about media in addition to teaching with it” [12]. Mediapro study refers that the appropriation of new media (Internet, mobile media) by the young people does not follow a common pattern to all countries. It identifies, however, a number of factors that influence it: i) motivation; ii) parents' influence in the use of new media iii) technical and communicative skills; iv) time availability; v) access; vi) socio-cultural context; vii) information from other media [13].

Media will influence the appropriation of other media by the young people. The greater appropriation the better is the communication, receiving and producing messages. Mediapro refers that the new media facilitate the contact among people and cultures, but alerts “the skills needed to meet the eyes of others and to communicate with them in curiosity and respect are more complex than the handling of computer techniques”. And concludes: “This is a challenge for school today” [13].

2 The CD-Rom

In Portugal, media education keeps pace with the referred studies. Mediapro recommendations in relation to our country consists in “developing media literacy in the Portuguese context”. As far as specific

recommendations we point out the organization of practical activities for pupils and teachers. It is also recommended the creation of a guide for teachers and educators on the pedagogical use of the new media. To the politicians it is recommended the integration of contents to develop media education and media literacy “on the teacher’s curricula and on the student’s curricula” [13].

Domaille and Buckingham refer to the Portuguese situation saying that media education does not exist as a subject. They also refer that the recent alterations “in the Basic School Curriculum (from grades 1 to 9) have created three new non-disciplinary curriculum areas that can all address Media Education issues” [14]. The report thinks that new areas allow media production, media languages and socio-economical structures analysis. It also refers that the use of new technologies is fundamental to the approaches mentioned before. At last it refers the initiative of the newspaper “Público”, “Público na escola”. This daily newspaper supports school newspapers production and organizes an annual school contest with the participation of 400 school either printed or online newspapers. The aim of the competition is to a) bring together school and current life, with particular emphasis on important issues; b) help youngsters to decode media language; c) develop a critical approach d) encourage the school population to read newspapers; e) guarantee a more active learning of the Portuguese language [15].

The production of school newspapers is still common, as it was in the thirties according to Freinet, on considering the school newspaper to be one of the factors in the “total pedagogical turnaround” [16]. As was the case then, the newspaper, nowadays, can be used in school as a source for discussion themes, thus, bringing together the school and daily life. Guerra points out the following need: “la escuela no puede permanecer aislada de la sociedad. (...) No se puede ignorar la situación que estamos viviendo, la dirección que lleva nuestra sociedad, las consignas que transmite” [17].

For Pinto, the school newspaper is a cheap and easily accessible media, “an important resource for developing a critical approach, style and habits regarding reflection and creativity, respect for the diversity of opinions and interest in current affairs.” He also says that the newspaper may be used in the classroom as “a precious educational tool available for a wide range of subjects” [18]. Opening the school gates to the outside world facilitates even more the discussion of similar problems. In this way it allows “supprimer la coupure entre sphère scolaire et espace social extérieur, que fait obstacle à l’apprentissage de la citoyenneté” [11]. The

production of the school newspaper can bring about a taste for research and the confrontation of ideas, which does not only occur between equals.

Citizenship education is in fashion nowadays specially in the educational discourse [19] and some see in it the social integration of citizens. Others think it is a means to help educating citizens to think critically and participate with a reflexive approach to society. Social interaction is nowadays made through media. Young people use mails, SMS, chat rooms, online video games and Internet. Having in mind the use of these new tools, a CD-Rom to develop media literacy and citizenship education was developed and tested in order to help not only 11 to 16 years old pupils (5th to 9th grade) but also teachers to produce printed or online newspapers. We designed and developed the CD-Rom “Let’s produce school newspapers”, that encompasses traditional media (school newspaper) with new media (CD-Rom, online newspaper), but takes the pupils further to Internet, to search engines and online handbooks. It explains the phases of a newspaper production and the different types of news; it motivates pupils to search information and to assess the work developed and it puts forward activities related to the school environment. In summary it motivates pupils to produce newspapers, to read and write critically and to become better citizens. It is inserted in the philosophy of criticizing media through media.

On another hand, the CD-Rom aims to contribute that children and young people should be listened by Mass Media. News on children increased at a high rate in the last decade, but rarely children are listened to. In a research conducted in 13 Irish newspapers in 2004, McNamara concludes that newspapers are controlled and in their majority written by adults. “Young people are regularly seen but rarely heard in these publications”. However he advocated that newspapers should reach young people in order to keep pace with audiences. And the task is feasible: “Improving the representation of young people in the media will require action from politicians, publishers, journalists and educators at every level – primary, secondary, third and mid-career” [20].

In Portugal we were involved in the project Children and Youth in the News, that analyses all news that deal with children published during one year in four daily Portuguese newspapers. It analyses 90 TV news journals recorded during 6 months. The project ends this October, but from the first results it is possible to refer that authorities that support associations of children and their families are the most involved. Children’s opinions are not part of the news. The reasons for this must be underlined in the final report of the project, as Ponte refers, the absences must be

one of the most interesting common facts in a discourse [21].

The authors of the study in Portugal are willing to inform enterprises and media professionals about the results what may contribute to change their behavior in relation to children and young people. It is what all over the world is being tried according to the World Young Readers Network, that belongs to the World Association of Newspapers [22]. There are registered projects developed in 68 countries in this network that aim to get news agencies, schools and students from different grades closer. Europe contributes with 27 projects, however none is from Portugal.

3 Technical options



Fig. 1 CD-Rom entrance screen

The CD-Rom has an autorun that opens the homepage of the main container. The central part of this screen appears with a green net [Fig.1] with the text that explains the CD-Rom objectives, how to use it and how to use help. The text is also read aloud automatically.



Fig. 2 CD-Rom Main screen

Afterwards it opens the entrance metaphor of the CD-Rom [Fig. 2] – a classroom. This decision was taken bearing in mind the users: teachers and pupils.

When the user moves the mouse on the objects in the classroom scenario, a balloon with text explaining which unit corresponds to that object appears (see example of Unit 2 in Fig. 2).

Clicking on the object one enters the corresponding unit. On the top of the main container there are four buttons and at the bottom of the page two. These buttons are constant in every screen. The user can see the title of the CD-Rom, the closing button to exit, besides the e-mail address of the author. It also has the help, the navigation map (dynamic with links to every unit section) the About the CD-Rom and the Glossary available.



Fig. 3 Navigation Map Screen

When clicked on these buttons a movie occurs in the centre of the screen with the corresponding contents (see the example: Navigation Map in Fig. 3).



Fig. 4 Writing for Newspapers Screen

The seven units of the CD-Rom also run in the central area of the screen. In the example (Fig. 4) the subcontainer includes the blue and pink areas. The blue area includes the title of the unit and the closing button to exit. The pink area includes the links to the topics of the unit. The lateral sub-container appears

on the left with the links to the subtopics. In the same example, the subtopic “Newspaper Report” has links to “Attention when writing a newspaper report” and “Activities”. In the right central area there is the third container where contents are loaded.

Five experts, three in the field of multimedia and two in journalism evaluated the pre-prototype of the CD-Rom “Let’s produce school newspapers”. After the analysis of the data from the evaluation, a set of technical, structural and content corrections were introduced in the definitive prototype. This prototype was used by pupils and teachers, in two Portuguese schools, to produce school newspapers. The sessions in which the CD-Rom was used were observed and recorded on audio and video.

4 The CD-Rom's use at school

In the beginning of the school year 2005/2006 copies were given to teachers and students to be used in classes of Portuguese language. One hundred and four students belonging to four classes (two from the 6th grade, one from the 7th grade and the other from the 8th grade) worked with the CD-Rom. During the classes the teachers used group work activities (three, four or five students in each group) to make activities to produce contents for the newspaper. These classes were audio and video recorded. A direct observation and field notes were also taken because the researcher was present in the classes as a non-participant observer. Data collected are being analysed but after a first analysis it is possible to say that the work developed to produce the school newspaper with the CD-Rom contributed to the development of Media Literacy.

5 Conclusion

The process described contributed to the development of skills in Media Literacy and Citizenship Education by the students. Students approach to big problems of the country i.e. the fire and students drop-out. They trained skills at text production level as well as production and comprehension of oral questions. They also approach other realities through the perception of how newspaper work is organized. They used the CD-Rom and the computer and contacted closely with the audio recorder and camera. Children and young people must be prepared to use media in a World where the new concept of literacy implies the use and interaction with media either digital or traditional. We understand therefore the European Union worries when asked the state-members to include Media Education in the school curricula.

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